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ABSTRACT

The persons and groups who held lead roles in the development of an electricity generating plant near Craig, Colorado, and/or aided in problem solving activities are the concerns of this examination of boomtown studies in which field theory is employed as a framework for assessing Craig's community structure characteristics. The usefulness of field theory is assessed in regard to enhancing a locality's capacity to deal with the boomtown phenomenon. A segmented community structure in Craig is exposed by an analysis of the actions taken by various persons and groups (including constructing new schools); and a common theme is revealed by a review of other boomtown studies, namely, that managing rapid change in a community is possible if local residents and groups can work cooperatively in identifying and solving common problems. It is concluded that field theory can provide a framework for the development of a local structure which can effectively plan for change, a structure that establishes programs which are comprehensive as to interests and coordinated as to effort. It is also concluded that if Craig and other boomtowns could have developed this type of coordinated local structure, the negative consequences of the boom on the host community would have been minimized. (AN)

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A CRITIQUE OF THE FREUDENBERG ENERGY BOOMTOWN STUDY FROM A FIELD THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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A Critique of the Freudenberg Energy Boomtown
Study from a Field Theory Perspective

Freudenberg's paper is based upon his study of the impact of a coal-fired electricity generating plant on a nearby community in northwestern Colorado. An assessment of the social and economic consequences of the plant's building on the host community has been treated at some length in earlier works by the author (Freudenberg, 1976; 1978; 1979). This paper concerns itself more with examining actors and associations who performed lead roles in the development of the energy facility and/or assisted in activities directed at the resolution of problems brought on by the rapid growth of the community.

In my brief discussion of the Freudenberg paper, I will attempt to: (1) employ field theory as a framework for assessing the characteristics of the local community structure in Craig; and (2) discuss the usefulness of field theory in enhancing a locality's capacity to deal with the boomtown phenomenon.

Characterizing the Local Structure

Field theorists note that in a close examination of the local society, one may find that activities which take place within it are being conducted along specific functional or interest lines in relative isolation from one another. In such instances, the structure of the locality may be characterized as segmented or autonomous in nature. On the other hand, one may uncover a structure in which associations and leaders participate jointly in activities across distinct fields of interest. This latter situation is reflective of a coordinative or integrative structure and denotes the ex-

istence of a community field.

Although an accurate characterization of the local structure in Craig would require more extensive analyses that what is provided in the Freudenberg paper, I believe a preliminary assessment can be made from the information presently available. I draw upon the works of Kaufman (1959) and Wilkinson (1970) to assist me in this effort.

Both Kaufman (1959:13) and Wilkinson (1970:317) state that six dimensions are important for differentiating the community field from other interactional fields:

1. degree to which actions express a broad range of interests;
2. degree to which actions are identified with the locality;
3. extent to which local residents are involved as participants, beneficiaries, or both;
4. relative number of local associations involved in carrying out actions;
5. degree to which the actions maintain or change the local society; and
6. extent to which actions are carried out in an organized and purposive fashion.

By relating some of these key components to Freudenberg's boomtown study, we can begin the process of determining the nature of the interactional field and thus, characteristics of the local structure, found in the city of Craig.

-Actions in the Craig Area-

There were several activities that took place in Craig over the time period examined by Freudenberg. To what extent did these actions, as well as actors and organizations associated with these actions, provide some

suggestion as to the type of field existing in Craig? A closer examination of these key elements (actions, actors and associations) can help to answer this question.

One of the important actions in the boomtown study was the energy facility itself. According to Freudenberg, its development in the Craig area resulted from the combined actions of several persons and groups, some of whom were members of the Craig community and others who were outsiders (1980:4). Who were the key actors and organizations associated with the energy plant? They were:

1. Major energy companies outside of Craig, particularly the Colorado-Ute Electric Association who represented a consortium of four electricity supply firms;
2. Federal agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management, Rural Electrification Administration, and the Environmental Protection Agency;
3. State and regional governments (e.g., Colorado State Impacts Office, Colorado Northwest Regional Council of Governments); and
4. County and city government officials.

To what extent were these groups involved in decisions relevant to the planning and development of the energy facility? According to Freudenberg, key decisions related to methods employed in the building of the plant and the major impacts associated with its development were made by the consortium of electricity supply firms. Changes which occurred in Craig were caused and carried out to a great extent, by external actors and not by local persons (1980:5).

Thus, simply stated, the building of the energy facility had limited locality-orientation. Local residents and associations had minimal involvement in any phase of the project. Important decisions were made by

individuals and organizations having no local reference.

However, could residents of Craig benefit from the energy facility? While this question is a difficult one, there are two facts worthy of consideration. First, since the plant was located just outside of the city limits, Craig would not benefit directly from the taxes paid by the energy company. Second, although the plant would be generating a sizable amount of electricity, most was scheduled to be delivered to users living over 100 miles from Craig. Thus, at least on the surface it appears that the local citizens would not benefit greatly from the energy plant.

-Actions to Deal with Local Growth-

A number of activities or projects were initiated in Craig as a consequence of the rapid growth of the locality. Among these were the expansion of the water and sewer systems, the building of more streets, new school buildings, new fire and police facilities, new government buildings, and the development of trailer parks. To what extent were local actors and associations involved in these actions?

From the information available in the Freudenberg paper, the brunt of the work fell into the hands of local government officials. Apparently, the expectation of local residents was that government office-holders would take the major initiative for providing services and facilities to the locality. Consequently there was little evidence of a broad-based initiative on the part of local residents to deal with the problems in Craig.

The only significant association that appears to have been created during the period under study was the "front-end finance committee." The committee certainly did not come into existence as a result of concerns

shared by energy company representatives and local government officials for the problems brought on by the boom. In fact, the comment by one energy company representative that "the only reason the committee was formed was because they (the county commissioners) slapped the moratorium on construction," was clearly indicative of the lack of cooperation that existed between these two groups prior to the committee's formation. Even with the establishment of the front-end finance committee, there appeared to be little evidence that anything significant was achieved by the group other than persuading the energy company to build a trailer park for its employees.

External agencies were involved, at least to some extent, in the actions taking place in the city of Craig. Federal government agencies such as H.U.D., D.O.E. and H.E.W. became involved as potential sources of funding for needed projects in Craig. Assistance in planning and grantsmanship was offered by the Regional Planning Council and the Governor's office. Of interest is Freudenberg's statement that "very few local residents appeared to have any awareness of the efforts of any of the regional governmental agencies, and only a slightly larger number knew of the existence of the Governor's office or its efforts (1980:10)." This observation lends additional credence to my assertion that local residents and associations showed minimal involvement in actions aimed at resolving problems in the city.

-Craig's Local Structure-

Kaufman and Wilkinson (1967) state that the strength of the community field is reflected in the local leadership's ability to anticipate and

define problems From the information contained in the Freudenberg paper, leaders in Craig failed miserably in this respect. Granted, the energy facility brought with it a host of problems over a relatively short period of time. But rumors of a major energy facility locating in the area had been circulating for a number of years. But even with the rumors, the local leadership failed to develop a blueprint for dealing with the potential impacts of such a facility.

In Kaufman's 1979 paper presented to the "Community and Regional Research Section" of the Rural Sociological Society, he notes that two important characteristics of a strong unified structure are: (1) a high level of generalized leadership actively involved; and (2) a community organization highly active in coordination and planning. In Craig, we find little evidence of a generalized leadership structure. Problems were addressed primarily by local government officials. There was no multi-interest focus in the resolution of problems. In addition, the establishment of a local association representing diverse fields of interest never materialized. As a result, the majority of planning and implementation activities to deal with local problems were left to a single interest field, the local government.

In sum, on the basis of the information presented in Freudenberg's paper, I would argue that the city of Craig displayed characteristics of a segmented structure given that: (1) activities in the local society generally involved actors and associations representing limited fields of interests; and (2) there was little evidence of leaders and associations from various areas of interest working collectively to solve the major problems confronting the city of Craig.

Boomcowns and Field Theory: Are They Compatible?

As Freudenberg and others have noted, the consequences of an industrial boom are enormous for the host community. The rapid growth in population brings with it sharp increases in the demand for housing, schools, municipal services, transportation and recreation. Strains are placed on the local economy and the general quality of life offered by the community. Are these changes manageable or are they beyond the capabilities of host communities? I believe they are manageable and would argue that field theory provides the necessary framework for bringing about orderly change in these localities. I draw upon other boomtown studies to lend substance to my statement.

Gilmore and Duff's (1975) study of Sweetwater County (Wyoming) focused on the consequences of accelerated growth brought on by energy company investments into the area. They found that the boom resulted in a deterioration in residents' quality of life, a decline in industrial productivity, and a failure of the local services sector to respond to the needs of residents.

In his general analysis of boomtowns, Gilmore (1976) provides some insight as to why the problems arose in Sweetwater County (and in other areas that have experienced energy resource development):

> The problems result(ed) from the traditional, business-as-usual boom in which unmanaged growth (was) the cumulative result of many different corporate, governmental and individual decisions mostly made in total isolation from each other... The results of such unmanaged growth (were) probably the leading source of upsets and conflicts that (could) be seen or anticipated in the process of western energy resource development (Gilmore, 1976:535).

Gilmore asserts that the solution to the dilemma lies in growth management. The process involves "generating enough cooperation among the groups and persons involved to develop the economic, political and social tools needed to use them to implement solutions to these questions: Where should growth be located? What should the rate of growth be? How should the benefits of growth be shared? How should the costs of growth be paid for, and who should pay for them? How can the parties-at-interest to growth be brought together to manage growth (Gilmore, 1976: 537)." As Gilmore notes, the parties-at-interest include not only government and industry, but commercial enterprises, local citizens and other individuals and organizations.

Another case study of an energy development's impact on a community in Wyoming was conducted by Nellis (1974) in the early 1970's. Like Gilmore and Duff (1975), he documented the severe strains placed on the community as a result of the boom. Of particular importance to the present discussion, however, was Nellis' recommendation that the community could have maximized the benefits but minimized the costs of the energy development if it had had comprehensive community planning efforts prior to the boom's arrival. The local people should have established some direction for their community "before the trailers rolled in."

A classic study of the social effects of industrial development on a local area is provided in the work titled Willow Run. The authors, Carr and Stermer (1952), examined Ford Motor Company's building of "the biggest mass production bomber plant in the world." They found the effects on Willow Run to be devastating. In fact, one Federal official referred

to Willow Run as "the worst mess in the whole United States." Why was this so? According to the authors, there was one overriding factor to the dilemma: "bomber workers, the U.A.W., the old-timers, the Ford Motor Company, and everybody else in (the community and county), all alike had no social machinery, no recognized pattern of procedure, except the political power struggle, by which to develop an overall pattern of cooperation which would successfully allocate the hardships and other costs of social change" (Carr and Stermer, 1952: 347).

Finally, a boomtown study conducted by Breese and his staff (1965) in Lower Bucks County, Pennsylvania provides an important variation on the boomtown theme. They too, examined the strains brought about by the introduction of a large industrial complex into an area. Unlike many boomtown researchers, however, they painted an image of a community working effectively to come to grips with rapid change. One observation made by the authors is particularly note-worthy:

> Special interest groups wielded considerable influence both in awakening citizens to the problems they faced and in directing their response to these problems... Such organizations as the Citizens Council for Planning in Bucks County, the American Friends Service Society, various welfare groups, the Philadelphia Housing Association, the Philadelphia Council of churches and newly formed organizations... were highly effective in voicing the interests of individual citizens through group representation (Breese and staff, 1965:156).

I believe there is a common theme that emerges from the boomtown works discussed above; managing rapid change in a community is attainable if local residents and organizations can work cooperatively in the identification and resolution of common concerns. In Craig, Sweetwater County and Willow Run, that capability did not exist. As a con-

sequence, each was ineffective in its efforts to deal with the boom.

The importance of field theory is that it provides a framework for the development of a local structure that can effectively plan for change, a structure that establishes programs which are comprehensive as to interests and coordinated as to effort (Kaufman, 1967:21). If Craig and other boomtowns would have had this type of coordinated local structure, the negative consequences of the boom on the host community would have been minimized.

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